

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
 INTERVIEW WITH JIM LEHRER ON THE PBS-TV PROGRAM, "THE MACNEIL/LEHRER NEWSHOUR"
 PENTAGON
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JIM LEHRER: Now to a newsmaker interview with the Secretary of Defense, William Perry.

Mr. Secretary, welcome.

SECRETARY PERRY: Good evening, Jim.

LEHRER: How are things going on the ground in Haiti, as we speak now, sir?

SECRETARY PERRY: So far, so good. We have brought in 3000 troops today. We have occupied and set up headquarters at the airport at Port-au-Prince. We have another battalion at the port, have brought two large what we call ro-ro ships, roll-on, roll-off ships, have been unloading the Bradley vehicles. All of this has been done without a shot being fired at an American.

So, to this point, things have gone very, very well indeed.

LEHRER: What is the -- what has been the attitude displayed toward the American service people? Are they there as invaders or as implementers, as peacekeepers, as friends? Have you gotten any reports back?

SECRETARY PERRY: Well, first of all, we consider ourselves there as friends, not as invaders. That is certainly the attitude of some of the Haitians we've talked with.

I think it's too early to see how that's going to settle down. We're going to try very hard to come across to the Haitians as friends, which we believe we are.

We have had a very, I think, significant discussion so far with the Haitian military, in particular.

LEHRER: With General Cedras?

SECRETARY PERRY: General Cedras. General Shelton and General Cedras met today. This was the first meeting between our commander and General Cedras relative to how -

- what kind of cooperation we're going to get from the Haitian military. It was a very productive meeting, very good meeting. And from that, General Shelton is encouraged to believe that he is going to have the ongoing cooperation.

LEHRER: Has he had it thus far?

SECRETARY PERRY: He has so far. Yes.

LEHRER: Can you explain what the -- who's in charge? Is General Cedras still in charge or is General Shelton in charge, or who's calling the shots right there -- right now?

SECRETARY PERRY: General Shelton is our military commander and he's in charge of the military forces, the U.S. military forces there, and will be in charge of the multinational force as soon as the other international units join with the U.S. units there.

LEHRER: But who is running, who is actually running the Haitian military? I mean are there -- what are the orders that the Haitian military has now and who's giving them?

SECRETARY PERRY: The Haitian military -- and that includes the Haitian police force, which is under the military...

LEHRER: These are 7000 people, all together, roughly. Right?

SECRETARY PERRY: Yes. Yes.

LEHRER: Okay.

SECRETARY PERRY: Are under the command of General Cedras and his deputy, General Biamby. And they continue to be responsible for maintaining order. They are the police force in the country.

LEHRER: They're still armed?

SECRETARY PERRY: They still are.

LEHRER: Live ammunition?

SECRETARY PERRY: Yes.

LEHRER: Any attempt going to be made to disarm them?

SECRETARY PERRY: That's not part of this particular operation now. That's going to be a question that comes up -- it's going to be an issue that comes up at such time as the turnover occurs, at the 15th.

We have a very, very good advantage here in having the Haitians continue to provide

the law and order in the country. As long as that works, our military role then will be a backup force, a quick reaction force in the event they're unable to maintain control. We do not want our military forces out doing street corner police work.

LEHRER: Is all the evidence -- I realize it's still early. But the evidence up till now, that when an American military person wants a certain thing done, his or her counterpart in the Haitian military reacts favorably and does it? Is that...

SECRETARY PERRY: To this point, that is correct.

LEHRER: And is there any reason to believe that's going to stop?

SECRETARY PERRY: I don't want to forecast, extrapolate forward from one day.

LEHRER: Sure.

SECRETARY PERRY: We still think this is a difficult, a complex operation. There are still risks ahead, still dangers ahead, still possibilities of casualties ahead.

LEHRER: Sure.

All right. Now, there are 3000 troops there now. What happens tomorrow?

SECRETARY PERRY: There will be another 3000, at least, troops land tomorrow. So we'll have six to seven thousand troops on the ground there, weather permitting, by the end of the day tomorrow.

LEHRER: And what kind of troops are these? These are also combat troops?

SECRETARY PERRY: These are mostly combat troops, but we also have engineering troops, we have specialists in port operations. So there's a variety of troops, but most of the ones in this first wave are combat troops.

LEHRER: We had a little piece in the news summary, but explain what the rules of engagement are for these American troops. What would have to happen to them in order for them to fire a round in anger?

SECRETARY PERRY: They would have to be -- to believe that their life is in danger, that they are being subjected, themselves, to potential violence. If they believe that, then

they are authorized to use deadly force.

LEHRER: What if they come upon two Haitians exercising deadly force between them?

SECRETARY PERRY: That's not their job. They're not performing a police function now. So that is still the job of the Haitian police.

LEHRER: Mr. Secretary, what are you planning for? What is the Pentagon planning for in terms of total forces and for how long these forces are going to stay?

SECRETARY PERRY: Jim, our original plan, which involved a forcible entry, involved up to 20,000 troops in a very short period of time, a few days. We also had an alternative plan which assumed that we had a permissive entry, much like we've had today. In that one, we were planning on 14,000 troops. Some of the -- the whole batch of paratroopers and the like were not necessary for this operation.

LEHRER: Did the Marines still go ashore?

SECRETARY PERRY: But let me say...

LEHRER: I'm sorry. Excuse me.

SECRETARY PERRY: That 14,000 did not assume cooperation.

LEHRER: I see.

SECRETARY PERRY: Did not assume cooperation from the Haitian military and the police, which we are now getting. If that continues and if we can confidently project that forward in the future, we can probably get by with fewer than 14,000 troops. We want to get by with as few as we can.

LEHRER: But the landing forces, like the Marines that were going to land further up the island and all that, is that still going to happen or has that already happened?

SECRETARY PERRY: That is still planned, that we'll have forces into some of the northern cities as well.

LEHRER: I know you don't want to project. But is the force, the peacekeeping force or the intervention force, whatever it's called at this point, is it prepared to react if things get rough?

SECRETARY PERRY: Yes. Of course.

All of our forces there are designed to be able to fully defend themselves. That is, we have an agreement and we're very happy with that agreement and it appears as if the Haitian military is honoring that agreement. But we are not counting on that agreement.

If you noticed in the TV clips of our forces landing at the airport this morning, they landed in full combat gear and prepared for combat if that were necessary.

So, we have a responsibility for the protection of our own troops, so every -- the rules of engagement reflect that, the size of the units reflect that, and the equipment that we're sending in reflect that. We have Bradleys unloading from these ships as we speak. Now, the Bradleys are not there because we expect to be conducting a combat engagement, but they are there as a quick reaction force if we run into trouble.

LEHRER: But there are additional forces. For instance, what I was getting at was that the ori -- if you'd gone in in a harmful situation,...

SECRETARY PERRY: Yes.

LEHRER: ...you said it might have taken 20,000. As it turns out, it may only take 14,000. Are those other six ready to go in if things start getting hot?

SECRETARY PERRY: Yes, they are.

LEHRER: And so...

SECRETARY PERRY: Absolutely.

LEHRER: You can go back to Plan A.

SECRETARY PERRY: We can go back to Plan A if that becomes necessary.

LEHRER: How close were you to Plan A when this thing got called off?

SECRETARY PERRY: We were in the process of executing Plan A when it got called off. We had more than 60 aircraft already in the air. We had the paratroopers in the air, ready to go. We had SEALs in the water. I mean we were in the process of executing, but not to the point yet where we could not turn it back. We were still several hours away from the point where -- from which we could no longer call it off.

LEHRER: Were all of the commanders

involved aware at that point that they might be called off? In other words, you know, we've all been to a lot of movies, Mr. Secretary, where the word didn't get to somebody. Had they been told, "Hey, this is a little bit different than some of the other military operations. We've got a former President and a U.S. Senator and a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff talking with those guys down there. Listen to your radio"? You know, was there something special at work?

SECRETARY PERRY: Yeah. We had exquisitely, exquisitely detailed communications on just that subject continuously through and particularly through Sunday afternoon.

LEHRER: So when the President said to you, "Call 'em back," there was no question in your mind that you could do that.

SECRETARY PERRY: Not a bit of a question.

LEHRER: Yeah. Yeah.

SECRETARY PERRY: In fact, I could have done it up -- for as long as another two hours after that.

LEHRER: Were you prepared -- what was going to be the situation if for some reason President Carter and General Powell and Senator Nunn weren't out of there when, according to the schedule, your folks were supposed to land?

SECRETARY PERRY: First of all, President Clinton would have ordered them to leave if they had not been out of there -- if they did not have an agreement and had not been out of there by a certain time.

LEHRER: Let's say the plane didn't start. Let's say there were three guys who laid down in front of the plane who didn't want them to leave. Or let's say there was some kind of skirmish.

SECRETARY PERRY: Without being too specific...

LEHRER: Sure. Okay.

SECRETARY PERRY: ...in answering your question, Jim, we had a very substantial force ready to deal with a contingency of that sort. Not an invasion, but just dealing with that kind of contingency. Yes, we had a special...

LEHRER: There at the airport.

SECRETARY PERRY: We had a specialized force, both in-country and very close nearby.

LEHRER: Mr. Secretary, are you comfortable with this kind of use of your forces, of the military of the United States, where you go right up to the brink and then, boom, call them back, and then what happen happened. Is this a legitimate use of power?

SECRETARY PERRY: This was, I think, an outstanding example of coercive diplomacy. Coercive diplomacy is the combination of military power and diplomacy. It's not using military power instead of diplomacy, it's using military power in the service of diplomacy. But in order for this coercive diplomacy to have any effect, you not only have to have the capability, you have to have the will to use that capability. And finally, there has to be a credibility.

In this case, in this case the Haitian regime, I think -- I think we lacked some credibility with that regime that we were going to use. They knew we had the capability but they doubted we were going to. And indeed, it was not until the invasion was imminent that I think it really came fully home to them the peril that was facing their country.

LEHRER: So you...

SECRETARY PERRY: And that's what made it credible, the actual -- in this case, we had to actually order the invasion before it became fully credible.

LEHRER: And you think if that had not happened, this might -- this deal might not have been struck.

SECRETARY PERRY: We can't redo history a second way, but I do believe that. Yes. I believe that not only the threat of military power but the imminent use of military power made an enormous difference and finally led to the agreement. Other things led to the agreement, too,...

LEHRER: Sure.

SECRETARY PERRY: ...including the skill of the negotiators.

LEHRER: Sure.

SECRETARY PERRY: President Carter,

Senator Nunn, General Powell all did just an absolutely outstanding job, and the country's indebted to them.

LEHRER: Are you comfortable and are your colleagues in the military comfortable with this, this outcome?

SECRETARY PERRY: Yes, we are. We could not be more pleased. We had -- we spent months preparing for this invasion, rehearsing and training. Last week I visited three different times our troops, talked with all of our field commanders, 4000 of our troops. They were at peak readiness. But not withstanding that, I think they were all pleased with the outcome, that we were able to go in as friends instead of having to go in shooting at Haitians.

LEHRER: Mr. Secretary, thank you very much.

SECRETARY PERRY: Thank you, Jim.